

# Hand, foot & mouth disease

## **What is hand, foot and mouth disease?**

Hand, foot and mouth disease is caused by coxsackievirus A and is not related to hoof-and-mouth disease in cattle.

## **Who gets hand, foot and mouth disease?**

Hand, foot and mouth disease occurs mainly in children younger than 10 years.

## **How is hand, foot and mouth disease spread?**

The disease is quite contagious and is spread by droplets from sneezing or coughing, as well as by direct contact with drainage from the nose and throat, fluid from the vesicles (small blisters which contain clear fluid), or the stool of infected persons. It occurs most often in summer and early autumn.

## **What are the symptoms of hand, foot and mouth disease?**

Hand, foot and mouth disease begins with a sore throat and a mild fever (more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit or 37.8 degrees Centigrade) that can last from one to three days. Painful vesicles form on the inside of the mouth usually on the cheek, gums and on the side of the tongue. Vesicles later appear on the feet and the hands and occasionally on the buttocks, and may persist for seven to 10 days.

## **How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms usually occur three to six days after exposure.

## **How long is a person able to spread hand, foot and mouth disease?**

A person is most contagious during the first week of the illness. Fecal or stool shedding can continue for several weeks after onset of infection, but the respiratory tract shedding usually is limited to a week or less.

## **Does past infection make a person immune?**

No. A person can become infected more than once.

## **What complications can happen from hand, foot and mouth disease?**

Although hand, foot and mouth disease usually has no lasting complications, infants who develop oral vesicles may stop nursing and become dehydrated. On rare occasions persons with the virus that causes hand, foot and mouth disease may develop viral meningitis.

## **What is the treatment for hand, foot and mouth disease?**

There is no specific treatment for hand, foot and mouth disease. Persons with the disease should rest and may be given medicine and liquids to control the fever and pain. Avoid foods that are salty, spicy and acidic. Also, avoid foods that need much chewing. Choose a soft diet with plenty of clear liquids. Rinse your mouth with warm water after eating. If symptoms persist and/or if your child refuses to eat or drink, call your health-care provider.

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## **What can be done to control the spread of hand, foot and mouth disease?**

- If possible, limit your contact with infected people.
- Wash your hands after contact with an infected person and contaminated articles (clothing, toys, bedding).
- Thoroughly clean contaminated surfaces and items using diluted solution of chlorine-containing bleach (made by mixing approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup bleach with one gallon of water).
- Exclusion from child care, school, work or other activities should be based on the person's symptoms. It is recommended that children be excluded from child care and school if they have a fever. There may be some benefit to exclude children from child care or school until the vesicles begin to decrease in size. However, there is no proof that this actually decreases spread of the infection. Generally, adults do not need to miss work if they feel well enough to conduct their normal activities.